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Africa Partnership Station Medical Training in Cameroon

Filed under FLEET AND THE FLEET MARINE FORCE. HEATH. OPERATIONS (ONE COMMENT)



Major Fabien Fouda, Head of Surgical Services for the 2nd Region Military Hospital, engages in a class-led discussion during the hemorrhage control lecture at the Africa Partnership Station (APS) medical workshop held in Douala, Cameroon.

By: Chief Hospital Corpsman (SW) Blake W. Cooper, medical planner at Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Africa

It's hard to explain Africa to someone who has never been there; it's even harder to explain the inner workings of the countries that make up this continent. Since its inception in 2007, the [Africa Partnership Station](#) (APS) has been the vehicle that allows Sailors and Marines to experience Africa first-hand through forming mentorships with African partners as part of an ongoing international effort to improve African nations' maritime safety and security.

As a medical planner for [Naval Forces Africa \(NAVAF\)](#) and APS, I've had the privilege of traveling to Africa on multiple occasions and seeing the continual progress made in each APS visit. Collaborating with a total of 58 U.S. Navy medical professionals in Africa, it never gets old. This iteration of APS medical workshops was the culmination of three years of planning and engagement with the Cameroonian military, and my seventh trip to [Cameroon](#) working with the medical professionals at the 2nd Regional Military Hospital (HRM2) in Douala.

APS concluded a medical training event March 13-16, 2012 that involved physicians, nurses and corpsman from U.S. Naval Hospital Naples, Italy and Naval Medical Center Portsmouth, Va., comprising a combined mentor team. The medical staff at HRM2 attended workshops facilitated by the mentor team in the subjects of emergency department training, surgical nursing skills, operating room sterilization procedures and Tactical Combat Casualty Care (TCCC).

As the plane touched-down and the mentor team members arrived in Douala for the first time to take-in their initial impressions of the sights and sounds of Cameroon, it was easy to get wrapped-up in the excitement of the place. It was one of those "pinch me" moments that we servicemembers who have worked in Africa all have experienced. This was Cameroon.

In true Navy fashion we quickly got down to business, meeting with our Cameroonian hosts for introductions and tours of the facility. This first meeting was eye-opening for the team,

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many who had served in Iraq and Afghanistan but had never been to Africa. There is an excitement here that is palpable, a want for knowledge and a spark of Cameroonian national pride for what is being accomplished by their medical professionals.

After the opening ceremony complete with brass band and media coverage from eight T.V. stations and several print publications, we were finally able to begin the workshops we had traveled across the globe to share. The Cameroonians were eager to learn, determined to get every bit of information they could from the U.S. Navy medical personnel there. The mentees listened intently, asked thoughtful questions and actively participated in discussions inspired by their own comments and curiosity. The days flew by, with everyone fully engaged and invested in the learning process.

During our time at HRM2, the surgical workshop leaders observed four surgical cases (external fixation of a femur fracture, cesarean section , mastectomy and hernia repair). The emergency department workshop outlined hemorrhage control modalities and basic ultra sound techniques as a diagnostic tool. And finally, the TCCC mentors prepared the Cameroonian instructors to train the non-medical Cameroonian military.

The following week, the Cameroonian trainers who were mentored in TCCC made history by teaching the first course ever taught entirely by Cameroonian military instructors to their fellow servicemembers, building the capacity to train their own personnel in life-saving combat casualty care techniques.



Dr. Christelle Tenke, Emergency Department Physician at the 2nd Region Military Hospital, instructs Tactical Combat Casualty Care (TCCC) students in I.V. insertion techniques during Africa Partnership Station (APS) TCCC mentorship sessions held in Douala, Cameroon.

At the conclusion of the week-long workshops and mentorship sessions a certificate was presented to each Cameroonian who attended the workshop, a graduation-of-sorts to mark their accomplishment and an indication to leadership that they were ready to use skills attained to aide their fellow Cameroonians.

This also marked a special occasion for the U.S. Navy professionals who participated in the mission. They had experienced Africa in a way that few ever have, by forming friendships with their Cameroonian brothers and sisters whom they had mentored. The hard thing to explain about Africa is that it’s all about the personal relationships you develop – the small moments you share, the brief encounters, the fragments of conversation – that really makes an impact for good, all against the exquisite backdrop of Africa.

As we all prepared to leave for our respective homes, our gracious hosts offered us small trinkets as tokens of remembrance so that we would never forget Cameroon. More

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importantly, I don't believe any of the Sailors who traveled here will ever forget the relationships that they had made. Africa becomes a part of you when you are fortunate enough to truly experience it, and that was something the U.S. Navy medical combined mentor team certainly had done. Their experiences in Cameroon will translate into vivid sea stories for years to come, and rightly so. You may leave Africa, but Africa never leaves you.

I highly encourage ALL Sailors to actively seek-out opportunities to be a part of Africa Partnership Station events; the experience will undoubtedly be unforgettable.

For more information Africa Partnership Station click [here](#).

Editor's Note: Photos provided by Naval Force's Africa (NAVAF) Public Affairs MC1 Alford and Force Medical HMC Cooper.

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